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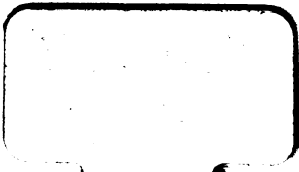
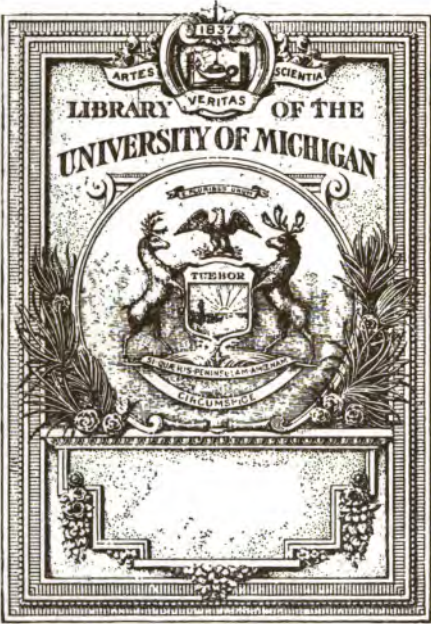
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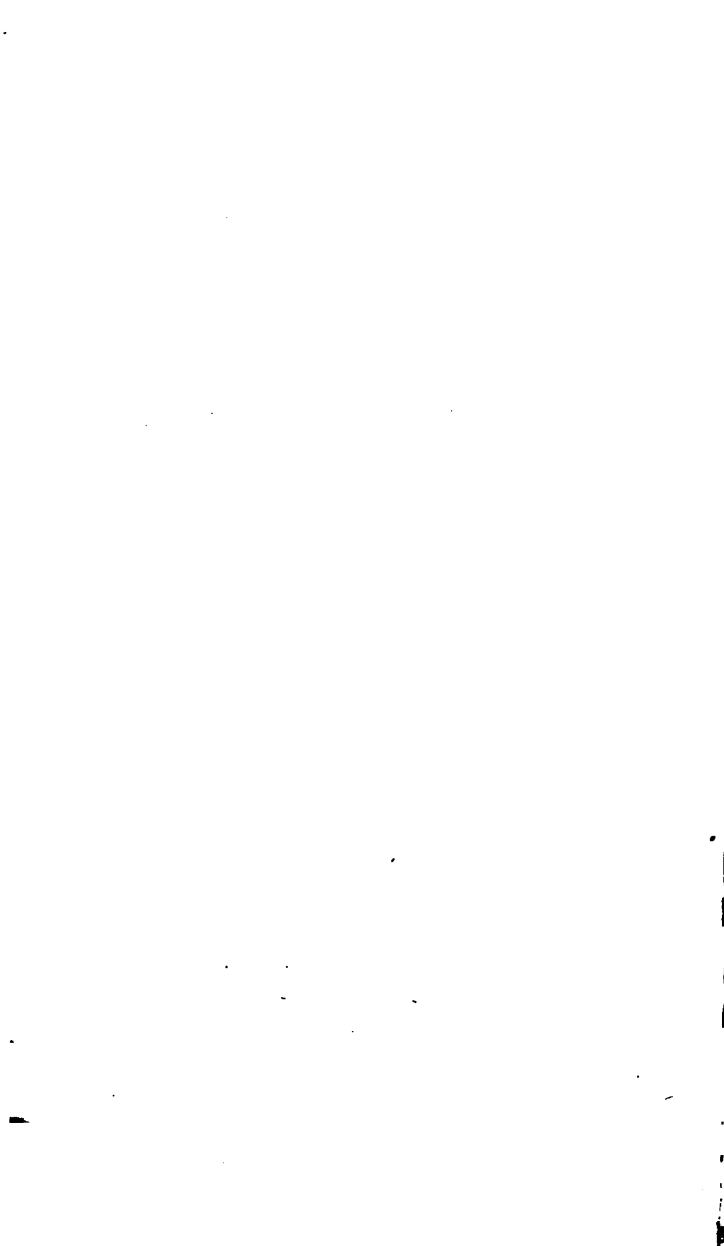


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THE OPPRESSED ENGLISH



John Hay Beith

THE OPPRESSED ENGLISH

BY
IAN HAY

Author of "The First Hundred Thousand,"
"Getting Together," "A Safety
Match," Etc.



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CHAPTER ONE



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CHAPTER ONE

As a Scotsman, the English people have my profound sympathy.

In the comic papers of all countries the Englishman is depicted—or was in the days of peace—as stupid, purseproud, thick-skinned, arrogant, and tyrannical. In practice, what is he? The whipping-boy of the British Empire.

In the War of to-day, for instance, whenever anything particularly unpleasant or unpopular has to be done—such as holding up neutral mails, or establishing a blacklist of neutral firms trading

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with the enemy—upon whom does the odium fall? Upon “England”; never upon France, and only occasionally upon Great Britain. The people and press interested thunder against “England’s Arrogance.” Again, in the neutral days, when an American newspaper published a pro-British article, Potsdam complained peevishly that the entire American Press was being bribed with “English” gold. A German school teacher is greeted by her infant class with the amiable formula: “Good morning, teacher. *Gott strafe England!*” (Never “Britain,” as a Scotsman once very rightly complained to me.) On the other hand, when there is any credit going round—say, for the

capture of a hitherto impregnable ridge on the Western Front—to whom is that credit assigned? Well, it depends. If the Canadians took the ridge, Canada gets the credit; and the world's press (including the press of London and England generally) pays due tribute to the invincible valour of the men from the Dominions. Or, if a Scottish or Irish regiment took the ridge, the official report from General Headquarters makes appreciative reference to the fact. But how often do we see the phrase: "The ridge was stormed, under heavy fire, by an English regiment?" Practically never. A victory gained by English boys from Devon or Yorkshire appears as a British victory, pure and simple.

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Now why? Why should the credit for the good deeds of the British Empire be ascribed to those respectively responsible—except the English—while the odium for the so-called bad deeds is lumped on to England alone? To a certain extent, England herself is to blame. When a Scotsman speaks of Scotland he means Scotland. An Irishman, when he speaks of Ireland, means Ireland and nowhere else. But when an Englishman speaks of “England,” he may mean Scotland, or Ireland, or even Canada! This playful habit of assuming that England is the Empire, and that the Empire is England, does not always make for imperial fraternity, even though in the vast majority of cases not

the slightest offence is intended. To the average Englishman it seems simpler to say "England."

But there are other and deeper reasons. England is a big nation, while the others are small. There are more people in London than in the whole of Scotland, or Ireland, or, until recent years, Canada. And a small nation is always intensely sensitive, and assertive, of its own nationality. The English, too, are an exceedingly placid nation. Their enemies call them self-satisfied, but this is hardly just. Scotsmen and Irishmen celebrate the mysteries of St. Andrew's Day and St. Patrick's Day with a fervour only equalled by that of the average American citizen on the Fourth of July. But

if you were to ask the average Englishman the date of St. George's Day, he probably would not be able to tell you: and under no circumstances would he dream of celebrating the occasion.

"Of course I am proud of being an Englishman," he says in effect; "but everybody realizes that. So why advertise the fact unnecessarily? Why make a cantata about it?"

It is this same attitude of mind which causes an Englishman to care little, provided a piece of work is *well* done for the cause in which he is interested, who gathers the credit. Instinct and tradition have taught him to set the cause above the prize. It is this characteristic which makes him such an amaz-

ingly successful subordinate official, whether in the Services or in commerce. He is not vitally interested to climb to the top. His job, for its own sake, suffices him. He is content to work below the waterline, and if the Ship goes forward he is satisfied. So he smiles paternally on these aggressively patriotic little brethren of his; allows them to absorb all possible credit for their respective achievements; and philosophically shoulders the responsibility for the shortcomings of the British Empire. It saves trouble; it saves explanation; and an average Englishman would rather be scalped than explain.

This stoical attitude is all very well, but it can undoubtedly be

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carried too far. Patience is a virtue, but an overthick skin is not. The courage of one's convictions can sometimes merge into blind indifference to the opinions of other people. From here it is a mere step to "You be damned!"

Let us consider the Englishman as he appears to the other inhabitants of the globe, be they relatives, friends, or foes.

CHAPTER TWO



CHAPTER TWO

An Englishman and an American, in the earlier stages of their acquaintance, are a complete mystery to one another. It seems incredible that two such different persons should speak the same tongue.

The points of difference are not fundamental, but superficial. However, things on the surface are always more conspicuous than things underneath. For instance, the Englishman and the American are both naturally warm-hearted. But when an American is glad to see you, he shakes your hand for

quite a while, and possibly will continue to hold it until he has concluded his address of welcome. The Englishman shakes your hand vigorously, drops it like a hot potato, and murmurs some stereotyped greeting to his boots. He feels somehow that it would be indecent to go farther.

In the subsequent conversation the American speaks as he thinks, clearly and with cohesion, articulating every syllable in a well-rounded sentence. To an Englishman, a well-rounded sentence savours of pedantry; so he clothes what is sometimes a most interesting remark in a few staccato phrases and a "Don't you know?"

The chief thing that an Englishman dreads at the outset of an

acquaintanceship is expansiveness. The more the stranger expands, the more the Englishman contracts. The only way to win his confidence is to show yourself as reticent and as perfunctory in conversation as himself. He will then recognize in you that rare and precious object, a kindred spirit, thaw rapidly, and unbosom himself to a surprising extent.

The characteristic of the Englishman which puzzles the American most is his apparent lack of interest in serious matters, and the carelessness or frivolity with which he refers to his own particular subject or specialty. The American, like the Athenian of old, is forever seeking for some new thing. And when he encounters that new

thing, nothing can prevent him getting to the roots of it. Consequently, when an American finds himself in the company of a man who possesses certain special skill or knowledge, it seems right and natural for him to draw that man out upon his own subject. But when dealing with an Englishman he usually draws a blank. He is met either by a cold stare or a smiling evasion. The man may be a distinguished statesman, or soldier, or writer; but to judge from his responses—half awkward, half humorous—to your shrewdest and most searching queries, on the subject of politics, or war, or letters, you will be left with the impression that you have been conversing with a flippant and rather

superficial amateur. To an American, who is accustomed to say his prayers to the gods of Knowledge and Efficiency, and who, to do him justice, is always willing to share knowledge with others, such conduct savours of childishness—nay, imbecility.

What the American does not realize—and one can hardly blame him—is this, that the average Englishman is reared up from schoolboyhood in the fear of two most awful and potent deities: “Side” and “Shop.” It is “side” to talk about yourself, or your work, or your achievements, or your ambitions, or your wife, or anything that is yours. This is perhaps no bad thing, but it certainly handicaps you as a conversational-

ist, because naturally a man never talks so well as upon his own subject. The twin deity, "Shop," is an even more ruthless tyrant. Never, under any circumstances, may you discuss professional matters out of official hours. To talk "shop" is perhaps the most accursed crime in the English Secular Decalogue (set down hereafter). For instance, in an English military Mess, a junior officer who referred at table to matters connected with the life of the regiment would render himself liable to stern rebuke. At Oxford or Cambridge, an undergraduate who ventured, during dinner, upon a quotation from the Classics, would be fined pots of ale all around.

In short, the more highly you are

qualified to speak on a subject, the more slightly you refer to it; and the more passionately you are interested in a matter, the less you say about it.

However, perhaps it would be simpler to set down the Englishman's Secular Decalogue at length, appending thereto the appropriate comments of the proverbial Man from Missouri. Here it is.

The Englishman's Secular Decalogue

(1) Thou shalt own allegiance to no man, save The King. Thou shalt be deferential to those above thee in station, and considerate of those below thee. To those of thine own rank thou mayest behave as seemeth good to thee.

[*The Man from Missouri*: "I own allegiance to nothing on earth but the American flag. As a democrat, I recognize no man as being either above or below me in station."]

(2) Thou shalt worship thine ancestors and family connections.

[*The Man from Missouri*: "You got nothing on me there. We worship our Ancestors, too. Did you ever know an American who hadn't got his pedigree worked out to three places of decimals? Besides, that is why many of us have got such a soft spot for that funny old island of yours."]

(3) Thou shalt not talk "shop."

[*The Man from Missouri*: "That strikes me as punk. As a business man, without any mildewed delusions about ancestral acres, or

the vulgarity of trade, my aim in life is to *do* business, and do it all the time, and never worry about hurting the feelings of the family ghost.”]

(4) Thou shalt not put on side.

[*The Man from Missouri*: “But you *do!*”

The Englishman: “No, we *don't!* That stiffness of manner is due to shyness.”

The Man from Missouri: “Very well, then. Let it go at that.”]

(5) Thou shalt not speak aught but flippantly of matters that concern thee deeply.

[*The Man from Missouri*: “There you puzzle me to death. When I feel glad about anything, or bad about anything, or mad about anything—well, it seems only common

sense to say so. Can't you see that?"

The Englishman: "No. It isn't done."]

(6) Thou shalt never make public thy domestic affairs. Above all, thou shalt never make open reference to thy women, in places where men gather together, such as the Club.

[*The Man from Missouri:* "Yes, that is sound. Still, I consider that as a nation you rather overdo the Secrets of the Harem proposition."]

(7) Thou shalt make War as a Sportsman. Thou shalt play the game. That is to say, thou shalt not study the science too laboriously beforehand, for that would savour of professionalism. And

when thou dost fight thou shalt have strict regard for the rules, even if it be to thine own hurt. Moreover, thou shalt play for thy side and not for thyself. Thou shalt visit no personal affront upon thine enemy when thou dost capture him, for that is not the game.

[*The Man from Missouri*: "Yes, I'm with you there all the time. Perhaps a little more seriousness and a little less pipeclay might help your Army, but no one denies their clean fighting."]

(8) Thou shalt never be in a hurry. Thou shalt employ deliberation in thought.

[*The Man from Missouri*: "Yes, sir, I know all about that! It used to make me hot under the collar to

sit and listen to an Englishman's mind working—on its first speed *all* the time. Now that I know you better, I am getting used to it; but I confess, right now, that there was a time when I regarded your entire nation as solid ivory from the ears up.”]

(9) Thou shalt not enter into friendly relations with a stranger, least of all a foreigner, until thou shalt have made enquiry concerning him. When thou hast discovered a common bond, however slight, thou shalt take him to thy bosom.

[*The Man from Missouri*: “Yes, that’s right. I once shared a ship-cabin with an Englishman on a seven-day trip. For three days we never got beyond ‘Good morn-

ing,' although I could see by the look in his eye that he was kindly disposed, and was only held back by want of a reference. However, the fourth day out he asked me if I had ever been in Shropshire. I said no, but my sister had once visited there, with some people whose name I have now forgotten. But that was enough. It appeared that he knew the people; he was their vassal, or overlord, or mortgagee, or something. After that he wanted to adopt me."]

(10) Thou shalt render thyself inconspicuous. Thou shalt not wear unusual apparel, or thou shalt be committed to a special hell reserved for those who, knowing better, wear made-up ties, or who compass unlawful combinations of

frock-coats, derby hats, and tan boots.

[*The Man from Missouri*: “Oh, you Clarence!”]

CHAPTER THREE



CHAPTER THREE

The Scotsman, in many ways, regards the Englishman from the same angle as the American. He shares the American's unconcealed anxiety to get to the root of the matter, and cannot understand a man who pretends that he does not want to get to the root of the matter, too. To a Scotsman, "ma career" (as John Shand used to call it in Barrie's play) is the one important fact of life; and although the most reserved creature in the world, he possesses none of the Englishman's self-consciousness; and it never occurs to him to do

anything so palpably insincere as to disown his legitimate ambitions. To a Scotsman, then, the English are a frivolous, feckless race, devoid of ambition, and incapable of handling weighty matters with the required degree of seriousness. So he comes to London and takes the helm. To-day a Scot is leading the British Army in France,¹ another is commanding the British Grand Fleet at sea,² while a third directs the Imperial General Staff at home.³ The Lord Chancellor is a Scot⁴; so are the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary.⁵ (The Prime Minister

¹ Sir Douglas Haig.

² Admiral Beatty.

³ Sir William Robertson.

⁴ Lord Findlay.

⁵ A. Bonar Law, who is half Canadian, and Arthur James Balfour.

is a Welshman¹, and The First Lord of the Admiralty is an Irishman.²) Yet no one has ever yet brought in a bill to give Home Rule to England!

Take the Dominions again. What is the attitude of Canada, Australasia, and South Africa to the mother country? Well, previous to the War it must be confessed that the sons of the Empire regarded their parent with a certain good-humoured tolerance, not unmixed with irritation. The British Dominions overseas are peopled by an essentially independent and sturdy race. They are descended from folk who left their native land and braved the un-

¹ David Lloyd George.

² Sir Edward Carson.

known, not because they were sent, but because an adventurous spirit bade them go forth and better themselves. The British colonies and dominions were all founded by younger sons, or men in search of a career. They were never in the first instance fathered by the State, as such. It was only after British interests in these distant lands grew too great and unwieldy for private control that the British Government reluctantly and tardily took over their management officially. Men sprung from such a stock are naturally impatient of stay-at-home folk who regard the British Empire as "England," and who speak patronisingly of "Colonials."

These little differences were

purely superficial, and by the subtle irony of fate it was left to Germany to demonstrate how very superficial they were. But they undoubtedly existed, very largely owing to the fact that some—only some—of the later immigrants into the Dominions were of a less hardy and desirable type than formerly—men who had come abroad not from any spirit of enterprise or adventure, but because they had been a failure at home. Such men were neither industrious nor adaptable. It was this class that was responsible for the occasional appearance in Canada and Australia of the legend: “No English need apply.” Another injustice to England as a whole!

India, again. Here “Pax, Bri-

tannica" exists in its highest and most creditable form. India is mainly governed by English university men, selected after laborious preparation and searching examination, from all walks of life. Each of these men is a living exemplification of the British supreme talent—the talent for efficient departmental work in a subordinate position. He may rule a district containing several million souls, and so long as he rules it, he will rule justly according to his lights, and he will not make a penny out of the operation. In due course he will return to England, and live in honourable obscurity upon a modest pension. But all this will not save him from being denounced as a tyrant and

interloper. The hill tribes of the north will cast resentful glances upon the man who represents the power which holds them back from the delectable plunderland of the south; while in Bengal over-educated Babus will bleat indignantly, regardless of the inevitable consequences to their property and their women, for the immediate withdrawal of the officious and unnecessary British rule from India. A thankless existence, my masters, yet somehow worth while, despite endless drudgery, absence of personal distinction, and years of absence from home and children. The Ship goes forward!

On the Continent of Europe, again, the English are regarded with varying degrees of affection

or dislike; but their appraisers are all unanimous in regarding them as slightly demented. To the French, for instance, the English Tommy, with his uncanny frivolity in the face of death, his passion for tea and jam, and his eternal football games behind the trenches, is a standing enigma and jest. But Frenchmen will always remember how the little British Army hurled itself to certain destruction, in August, 1914, at the mere call of friendship, and French women will never, never forget the exemplary behaviour of the British soldiers toward the civil population behind the line.

As for the German, his opinion can be succinctly summarised. Before the War he regarded the

Englishman from a military point of view as a negligible quantity, from the commercial point of view as a back-number, and from the diplomatic point of view as the easiest thing on earth. Now, according to latest official intelligence from Potsdam, it was the reptile statesmanship of England that conspired with France and Russia to invade peaceful Germany, and it is "English gold" that has lured the people of America to disastrous participation in the common doom of the Allies. As a soldier, the Englishman has done better than Potsdam expected: but only by shameful contravention of the usages of war. The Prussian is a great stickler for etiquette in this respect. War to him, whether he

be emitting chlorine gas or sinking a hospital ship, is a serious—nay, sacred—business. But the imbecile English persist in regarding war as a game. What is worse, they win the game. Not long ago a regiment of “Kitchener’s Army” captured a strongly fortified village from the Prussian Guard. That was bad enough, but the manner in which it was done amounted to nothing less than an outrageous breach of professional etiquette. They went to the assault kicking a football! Their commander kicked off, and they never stopped until they had kicked the ball, riddled with bullets, into the trench and captured the garrison. And yet the English have the temerity to complain of German breaches of Inter-

national Law! Yes, I fear the English are most harshly spoken of in Germany just now.

There remains one other point of view to consider, and that is the Irish point of view. It must have a chapter to itself. Ireland usually gets a chapter to herself.



CHAPTER FOUR



CHAPTER FOUR

One of the first queries put to a Briton by an American after the pair have achieved a certain degree of intimacy, is: "Why can't you people settle the Irish Question?"

The form of the query varies in intensity. Earnest well-wishers say: "I don't profess to understand the ins and outs of the matter, but wouldn't it save a deal of trouble all round if you were to *give* them Home Rule and have done with it?" Candid friends say, quite simply: "If you English can't run Ireland yourselves, why

not let the Irish have a try?" (Here again we may note that England, not Great Britain, gets the blame.) Finally, a well-meaning but ferocious lady wrote to me the other day from the Middle West, to enquire: "How does England dare to pose as the champion of Belgium, when all the while she is grinding poor Ireland under her heel?"

All this is very illuminating, and at the same time distressing, to the stay-at-home Briton, who had always imagined that his domestic troubles were his own property, and were not causing concern to other people. But it is an undoubted fact, and cannot be too strongly impressed upon the English people, that the failure of

Great Britain to settle the so-called Irish Question is a distinct bar to a complete entente cordiale with America, and, to a certain extent, with the British Dominions overseas.

But before plunging more deeply into the matter, let us make one thing clear. It is not from want of effort or from lack of good will on the part of the English people that the Irish problem still remains unsolved.

This is not, thank Heaven! a disquisition upon the pros and cons of the Home Rule Question. Home Rule is coming quite soon, anyway. But it is permissible to set down here, briefly, the reasons why the English people have so steadily declined to accede to Ire-

land's persistent demand for a separate Parliament for so many years.

The first rock upon which both sides split is the difficulty of determining what, exactly, is meant by "Home Rule."

When a responsible leader of the Irish Nationalist party states his case to an audience which is friendly without being bigoted—in Canada, say, or at a meeting of moderate English Liberals—he clothes his appeal in some such words as these:

"All we ask is the right, as a little nation, to conduct our affairs in our own way, without interference from the officials of another and more powerful nation. Ireland free, and Ireland a nation,

can then take her proper place as a loyal daughter of the Empire, side by side with Canada and Australia."

Well, nothing could sound more reasonable or unexceptionable than that. But two comments present themselves. In the first place, you will note that the orator says "We." "We" means the Nationalist Party, representing about seventy per cent.—possibly more—of the Irish nation, and ignores the existence of the minority—a minority which, before the War, had deliberately and openly declared its intention, and was fully prepared, to fight and die rather than be forced out of the Union. Such a determination was doubtless very indefensible, but there it stands. It is recorded here

as one of the trifling factors which prevent the Irish Question from being settled out of hand by the mere wave of some amateur magician's wand. Secondly, it implies that Ireland is not free. Now here is a statement that can be refuted at once. Ireland is just as free as England and Scotland and Wales. In one respect her freedom is very much greater, for she is heavily over-represented in the House of Commons. An Irish member, returned by a remote Galway fishing village of fifteen hundred voters, can balance the vote, say, of an English member representing a great working-class constituency of forty or fifty thousand. If a redistribution of seats, on a basis of proportional

representation, were to be ordered in the House of Commons to-day, Ireland would automatically lose about thirty seats. The Irish members, then, wield a power in the councils of the United Kingdom to-day quite out of proportion to the population of the country which they represent.

In another respect Ireland enjoys a freedom not vouchsafed to the nations of the sister isle. In the dim and distant days before the War, Mr. Lloyd George was engaged in a campaign of what his friends called Social Reform, and his victims Rank Piracy. One of his most unpopular flights of legislation was the Land Valuation Act, and another was his National Insurance scheme. Neither of these

acts has ever been visited upon Ireland, for the simple reason that the Irish people refused to entertain them at any price; so the oppressed English, as usual, gave way, and paid the piper alone. Again, last year, when the Military Service Act, imposing conscription upon every able-bodied man between nineteen and forty-one, became law, Ireland was once more exempted. To the black shame and grief of every true Irishman, Ireland to-day stands officially aloof and alone in the struggle for liberty and humanity. The thousands of her gallant sons who are fighting in the trenches alongside their English and Scottish and Ulster comrades find difficulty in filling up the gaps in their ranks,

because certain of their brothers prefer to stay at home—to make political bargains, or to engage in the profitable task of supplying the demands of depleted Great Britain for ablebodied labour.

So much, then, for the little flaws underlying the responsible Nationalist's earnest appeal. But a greater shock to the sentimental supporter of Home Rule, as such, comes when he is confronted with this same modest proposal translated into the actual terms of an Act of Parliament. The Home Rule Act, the storm-centre of the summer of 1914—so severe was the storm that it quite dispelled the fears of Germany lest Great Britain should step in and interfere with the great *coup* planned for August

—contained the following provisions; and these provisions were the irreducible minimum which the Nationalist Party (who held the balance of power in the House) were prepared to accept:

(1) A Parliament to be established in Dublin.

(2) Ireland to be exempt from Imperial taxation. Great Britain was to pay for the entire upkeep of the Army and Navy, but to continue to pay the Irish Old Age Pensions, together with an annual subsidy to Ireland. In other words, England and Scotland were to find the money, and The Irish Executive were to spend it. The sum involved, including both direct payments and remissions of taxation, amounted to an annual

free gift of about thirty-five million dollars.

(3) About forty Irish members were to be retained in the House of Commons.

There were many other clauses, but these three will suffice to show the difference between a Home Ruler indulging in sentimental aspirations and the same gentleman engaged in the transaction of business. The second clause might have passed muster; for the Englishman, with all his faults, has never been niggardly. But Clause Three broke the camel's back.

To the average Englishman the one redeeming feature of Home Rule was the prospect it offered of getting rid, once and for all, of the Irish members from Westminster.

The gentle intimation that forty of these would still remain, to assist in the counsels of England and Scotland, and incidentally to glean such further pickings for Ireland as could be secured by the help of forty skilfully manipulated votes, was too much even for the much-enduring Englishman. The worm turned, and the storm broke. It is difficult to understand why such an astute leader as Mr. Redmond should have insisted upon such a condition; for it automatically destroyed the claim upon which he based his plea for the sympathy of the United States and the Dominions—namely, the plea that Ireland should be permitted to govern herself after the fashion of Canada and Australia, neither in-

terfering with or being interfered with by the Parliament at Westminster.

Further into the political merits of the case we need not go. As already stated, the purpose of this disquisition is not to prove a case for or against Home Rule, but to point out to friends whose knowledge of the subject has been derived almost entirely from the perfervid orations of imaginative gentlemen with Irish surnames and (too often) German salaries, who have abandoned their beloved land for the more sympathetic and lucrative atmosphere of New York—firstly, that England during the past fifty years has stopped at nothing, short of the disintegration of the United Kingdom, to remove

and assuage the ancient grievance of Ireland; and secondly, that the chief bar to a complete and speedy settlement of the affair is, and always has been, the inability of a lovable but irresponsible people to agree amongst themselves as to what they really want.

The task of redressing wrongs has not been confined to one Party. Fifty years ago the Church of England was the Established Church of Ireland—an obvious injustice to a people of whom the great majority were Catholics. Therefore the Church of England in Ireland was disestablished, by a Liberal Government under Mr. Gladstone. Again, for generations the cry had gone up from Ireland that Irish land was owned by great

landlords of English descent, who spent most of their time in London, and confined their energies as lords of the manor to evicting such of their tenants as could not or would not pay their rent. This was obviously a very wrong state of affairs, and fifteen years ago a Unionist Government set out to put it right. Parliament passed George Wyndham's Land Purchase Act, the object of which was to enable the tenant-farmers of Ireland to *buy* their farms from the landlords. The tenant was invited to state the sum which he could afford to pay for his farm, and the landlord was invited to state the sum which he was prepared to accept. This was indeed a gorgeous opportunity for both tenant

and landlord. The two amounts, having been stated, were adjusted and confirmed by a Board, and the intervening gap—no small gap, as may be imagined—was bridged by the English taxpayer. This little experiment in philanthropy cost the tyrannical English considerably more than five hundred million dollars. Under its provisions every Irish peasant is now his own proprietor. Evictions are a thing of the past. Yet how often is this fact so much as admitted by soulful exploiters of Erin's wrongs in America or the Dominions?

Then, as regards Ireland's inability to express her desires with a single voice. Roughly, Irish political parties fall under the following heads:

(1) The official Nationalist Party, under Mr. John Redmond.

(2) The Protestants of the North.

(3) The Unionists of the South and West.

(4) The frankly revolutionary party (Sinn Feinn, Clan-na-Gael, etc.), whose "platform" is absolute separation from England and the British Empire.

The official Nationalist Party is divided into many groups, but at its best it represents the true soul of Ireland—the soul of a high-spirited, imaginative, and intensely quick-witted people—fiercely impatient of the stolid, matter-of-fact, self-complacent race across the Irish Sea. In this respect Ireland resembles a "tem-

peramental" wife married to an intensely respectable but unexciting husband. She wants to "live her own life." The Irish character again, ever prone to dream and brood, prevents Ireland from forgetting her ancient wrongs. Heaven knows they were grievous enough; but they were probably no worse than those of Scotland; and if they had been regarded as hers were by Scotland, they need have left no permanent mark. Edward the First, "The Hammer of the Scots," wrought no less havoc in the days of Wallace than Essex and Sir John Perrot in the time of Elizabeth. Ireland has her Ormonde, and that grim forerunner of Democracy, Oliver Cromwell. Scotland can point, with an equal

degree of unhappy satisfaction, to Claverhouse and the Butcher Cumberland. But the phlegmatic Scot has avenged these outrages in subtle fashion. He does not brood; he simply migrates to England in the capacity of a peaceful trader, and proceeds to spoil the Egyptians at his leisure. Ireland, differently constituted, refuses to forget. And it is those two overwhelming forces—undying resentment, and impatience of the control of an intellectually inferior though mentally more stable race—that lie at the root of the Irish Home Rule agitation of to-day. “Leave us to ourselves!” cry the Nationalists. “We don’t *want* to be brought up-to-date! We don’t *want* to be made business-like and

efficient! We don't *want* scientific farming, or state-aided incubators, or sanitary milk cans. We are not interested in the glorious British Empire. We only ask to be left alone with our own beloved, witty, unmethodical country, to manage or mismanage as we please!" And it is that sentiment which has underlain the steady, consistent resistance of the official Nationalist Party to all attempts on the part of England—some of them very admirable attempts—to improve the condition of Ireland. Their attitude is perfectly logical. Such legislation, if successful, would prevent the coming of Home Rule. And most of the bitterness and sorrow of the last thirty years has arisen from the inability—perhaps

natural—of the average matter-of-fact Englishman to appreciate that attitude of mind.

“We offer you,” he says, “a fair and equal share—the same as our own—in the running of the greatest Empire that the world has ever seen. For goodness sake what more do you want?” And back, without fail, comes the unvarying cry—so heartfelt, so tragic, yet in many ways so unsubstantial:—

“Ireland a Nation! Ireland Free!”

And if only Ireland could have formulated her appeal in a spirit more in accordance with that genuine *cri du cœur*, and less in the spirit of the extremely materialistic Home Rule Bill of 1914, there is

little doubt that she would have had her wish long ago.

Then Ulster. The men of Ulster differ entirely from the other elements of Irish political society in knowing exactly what they want.

“We belong,” they announce, “to the Union; we are proud of the Union; and we shall resist, to the death if need be, any attempts to force us out of it.”

That is all there is to be said about Ulster. But the brevity of Ulster's contribution to the controversy does not simplify the solution in any way.

Here is a curious footnote to the Ulster problem. Americans will remember that in the early summer

of 1914 certain British Regiments (unconscious of the very different task which awaited them in August) were instructed to hold themselves in readiness to enforce the Home Rule Act on Ulster. A number of the officers of those regiments resigned their commissions rather than fight against their own kin. They were much criticised at the time. But in 1776, when the British Army was mobilized against the American Colonies, a number of British officers resigned their commissions, too (and incidentally sacrificed their careers), rather than fight against their own flesh and blood across the sea. Thus does History repeat herself.

Then the Unionists of the West

and South. Their sentiments are the sentiments of Ulster, but their position is very different. Though numerically quite strong, they are scattered over a wide area. They cannot, like centralized Ulster, act on "interior lines"; and it is probable that when a definite form of Home Rule crystallizes out of the present turmoil, it will be found that their interests have been sacrificed by the mutual consent of the stronger factions.

Lastly, that curious medley of brooding visionaries—ever the prey of the agitator—political place-hunters, subsidised pro-Germans, and ordinary cut-throats, which calls itself Sinn Feinn. This interesting organization is actuated by a

variety of sentiments, varying from a passionate remembrance of woes long past down to a sound business instinct for the loaves and fishes of salaried office. The tie which binds together all its incongruous elements is a fierce hatred of England, derived possibly from the remembrance that rather more than two centuries ago Oliver Cromwell sacked the fair city of Drogheda, or in certain individual cases from a lively personal recollection of having been committed to gaol for three months by a tyrannical magistrate for the trifling indiscretion of burglary or theft.

Whatever its motives or ideals, this party has only one panacea for all ills, and that is complete separation from "England." They aspire

to none of the status of Canada or the other Dominions; they are out for secession, pure and simple—secession accompanied, if possible, by a mortal blow at the hated pride of England. In order to put their amiable intention into effect, the Sinn Feinners proceeded, on Easter Monday of 1916, to deal the British peoples, including some three hundred thousand of their own compatriots serving on the Western Front, a stab in the back in the shape of that grim medley of tragedy and farce, the Dublin “revolution.” The farce was supplied by Germany, which deposited upon the western shores of Ireland, from a submarine, a degenerate criminal lunatic named Casement, who had already failed egregiously

in a monstrous effort to seduce the Irish prisoners in the German prison camps from allegiance to their cause. Casement was promptly arrested by the local village policeman, and his share in the matter ended. But in Dublin there was no lack of tragedy. The forces of the "revolution" struck the first blow for Freedom by an indiscriminate massacre of such British soldiers as happened to be strolling about the streets, unarmed, in their "walking out" dress. The killing was then extended to a large number of innocent civilians, not all of the male sex; and the apostles of Freedom then settled down, with the able assistance of the slum population, to the unrestrained looting of the shops and houses of Dublin.

Naturally the whole of Ireland stood aghast at the crime. Denunciations of the murderers poured in from every side, irrespective of political creed. The leader of the Nationalist Party publicly repudiated and condemned the occurrence in the House of Commons. Never did England and Ireland stand so close together as on that day. But one thing was morally certain from the start, and that was that when the first flush of indignation had died down, the old pernicious sentimentality and political animus would raise their heads again. And it was so. The "revolution" was crushed. Some twelve or fifteen executions took place, either of men who had been directly convicted of deliberate

murder, or of those who had set their names to the outrageous document which authorized the same. It is difficult, considering the circumstances, to see how a conscientious tribunal could have done less, for to have condoned such a blend of black treachery and plain murder would rightly have been construed as an act of weakness. But it is even more difficult—nay, impossible—to conceive any handling of the situation out of which persons interested would have refrained from making political capital. The Oppressed English were booked for trouble, both “going and coming.”

Probably it would have been best to have held a series of drum-head courts-martial, followed by

instantaneous executions, wherever necessary, while public opinion was not merely prepared but anxious for such. But that is not the English way. Each prisoner was accorded a full, conscientious, and lengthy trial. What was worse, the trials were held *seriatim*; with the result that by the time the last man had been condemned or acquitted, Irish public opinion, ever volatile, had veered round to an attitude of sympathy with the frustrated conspirators. The opportunity to denounce "English justice" was too strong. The fact that scores of innocent people had been foully murdered by the "revolutionists" was forgotten. As might have been anticipated from the start, the odium

for the whole tragic occurrence, both the crime and the punishment, was laid by popular acclamation upon the shoulders of England. To-day, particularly in the United States, industrious propagandists are busily engaged in extolling the virtues of the departed criminals; and no tale seems too improbable, no accusation too fantastic, for those whose profession it is to disseminate them.

One case in particular has gained unnecessary notoriety in the United States. An unfortunate man named Skeffington, a harmless visionary, instead of following the counsels of common sense and staying at home, wandered forth into the streets of Dublin during the height of the rioting. Here he was

arrested by an English officer who, with a party of troops, was engaged in clearing the streets. This officer had recently returned from the Western Front on sick leave. Utterly unstrung by the appalling sights which confronted him, he appears to have suddenly lost his mental balance. At the end of the day he visited the barracks where his prisoners were confined, selected Skeffington and two others, and ordered their execution. The sentence was carried out. In due course the matter was reported to the authorities; a searching inquiry was held; and the afflicted officer was confined in an insane asylum. Such are the facts of the wretched occurrence; the wonder is, not that it should have happened, but that,

in all the turmoil and agony of that hellish night in Dublin, it should only have happened once. But it is easy to imagine the form in which the story is being presented in the United States. Poor Skeffington is now canonised as a man who died for freedom with his back against a wall; while his widow is, or was, touring the chief cities of America, where she is being exploited by astute politicians (with Teutonic axes to grind) as a victim of the tyrannical "English" Government.



CHAPTER FIVE



CHAPTER FIVE

The redeeming feature of Irish politics lies in the fact that the grimmest tragedy is never far removed from the wildest farce. For example, within the last few months two by-elections have been held in Ireland for the purpose of returning new members to the House of Commons. In each case the candidates have been respectively an official Nationalist and a Sinn Feinner. That is to say, a representative of the constitutional Home Rule Party has been pitted against a member of the frankly separatist and revolutionary party.

In each case the Sinn Feinner has been elected. The fact that one of these gentlemen is at present undergoing a term of penal servitude somewhat prejudices his chances of taking part for the present in the counsels of the Empire. It also adds one more little complication to the task of selecting a suitable constitution for a nation which allows its undoubted sense of humour to run away so completely with its sense of national responsibility.

As these words are written, the news comes that that resourceful statesman, David Lloyd George, has conceived the happy notion of collecting all the Irish political parties around one table, with instructions to evolve a constitution

of their own—the instructions being backed by the information that the offspring of this convention, provided it conforms to the most elementary criterions of common sense, will receive official endorsement forthwith. The present titanic struggle on the Western Front pales into insignificance at the thought of what will go on around that table. What will be evolved we do not know; but two things seem certain. Firstly, practically any scheme of Home Rule upon which the combatants can agree will be accepted by the people of England and Scotland. They are genuinely fond of their brave, witty, and turbulent neighbours; they are genuinely appreciative of the splendid work that has

been done in the War by the Irish troops; they are broadminded enough to bear no malice for the recent disturbance in Dublin, for they can now view that untimely abortion in the right perspective; and they are painfully conscious that their own efforts to confer peace and contentment upon Ireland have not been an unqualified success. Finally, they are sick of strife and argument; and it is probable that any scheme which does not abandon Ireland, and incidentally expose the adjoining coast of England, to the intrigues and designs of a corrupt and Teutonically inclined Separatist Party—and it is this fear which has lain at the very foot of English opposition to Irish Home Rule for

generations—will go through. And may that day not be far distant!

Secondly (and from the point of view of this laboured discourse, most important of all), it can never be said again, either by doubting friend or candid critic, that Ireland is debarred from selecting her own form of government by the action of the English people.



CHAPTER SIX



CHAPTER SIX

Ireland, as ever, has drawn us far from our text.

But I have said enough to demonstrate to unbiassed observers the present deplorable status of that unfortunate country, England. To-day her chief offices of State are occupied by Scotsmen of the most ruthless type; Wales supplies her with Prime Ministers; while Ireland appropriates all her spare cash and calls her a blood-sucker. When the War is over, and the world has leisure to devote itself to certain long-postponed domestic reforms, it is most de-

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voutly to be hoped that the case of that unhappy but not undeserving people, the English, may be taken in hand, and that they be granted some measure, however slight, of political freedom. After that we must do something for Poland.